PARTNERING OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS FOR ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

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Abstract. With great losses in the Nation's ecosystem function and structure, collaborative efforts that leverage resources are essential for restoring the environment. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, through its various environmental programs is capable of offering its water resources planning, design, and construction expertise to implement environmental projects that sustain biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. Through partnering, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ecosystem projects have protected and restored approximately 165,000 acres of various types of habitat and over 50 miles of stream in the U.S. The purpose of this paper is to inform other Federal agencies, non-Federal entities, and non-profit organizations of the opportunities to work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on studies and projects that support ecosystem restoration.

SUPPORTING NATIONAL POLICY

National policy continues to guide Federal efforts to advance environmental goals through amending and adding new water resources authorizations. These authorizations, consequently, continue to enhance opportunities for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to participate with other Federal, state, regional, local and non-profit entities in studies and projects that support the restoration of degraded ecosystems.

STEWARDSHIP

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in its water resources program alone, is the steward of nearly 12 million acres of public land and water such as lakes and facilities at Hartwell, Richard B. Russel and J. Strom Thurmond projects. The goals of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers environmental stewardship are to: (1) manage lands and waters to ensure their availability for future generations and (2) help sustain healthy ecosystems and biodiversity.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is entrusted to care for a wide variety of water and related land resources including: fish and wildlife, forests and woodlands, grasslands and rangelands, wetlands, endangered species and all other ecological resources within watersheds.

Stewardship of ecological resources is integrated with other project goals to balance ecological and economic needs. For example, the primary purpose of a project could be for preventing property damages from floods, while, at the same time, being managed for fish and wildlife, water quality, water supply, recreation and other needs of the public.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITIES

The Water Resources Development Act of 1990 was an important change in policy direction for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Act provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with a more prominent role in ecosystem restoration. Section 306 authorizes the Secretary of Army to "...include environmental protection as one of the primary missions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in planning, designing, constructing, operating and maintaining water resources projects." In addition, Section 307(a) establishes "no net loss in wetlands" and "an increase in the quality and quantity of the Nation's wetlands" as goals of the water resources development program. In response, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works included environmental restoration and protection as a primary project purpose equal to the status of traditional navigation and flood damage reduction studies and projects.

Table 1. Summary of Programmatic Authorities

Authority	Study/Project Description	Study Cost	Project Cost
Section 22 Planning Assistance to States	Studies for a wide range of water and related land resources issues	50% Federal 50% Non-Federal	N/A
Section 1135 Small Ecosystem Restoration	Restoration of degraded ecosystems where the degradation is associated with the presence of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project	**Preliminary Restoration Plan** 100% Federal **Ecosystem Restoration Report** 75% Federal and 25% Non-Federal	**Total Project Costs** 25% Non-Federal 75% Federal **Max Federal Cost** - $5M
Section 206 Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration	Restoration of degraded ecosystems where the degradation is not associated with a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project	**Preliminary Restoration Plan** 100% Federal **Ecosystem Restoration Report** 65% Federal and 35% Non-Federal	**Total Project Costs** 35% Non-Federal 65% Federal **Max Federal Cost** - $5M
Section 204 Beneficial Uses of Dredged Sediments	Protection, restoration and creation of aquatic and/or wetland habitats associated with dredging for authorized projects	**Initial Appraisal** 100% Federal **Feasibility** - 75% Federal and 25% Non-Federal	**Total Project Costs** 25% Non-Federal 75% Federal **Max Federal Cost** - $5M

A summary of the cost-share allocations between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a non-Federal sponsor for programmatic authorities is shown in Table 1. The following is a list of authorities that have been provided by Congress for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to address the restoration of ecological resources.

Study Authorities

- Congress authorizes studies pursued under General Investigations for single purpose ecosystem restoration, multipurpose projects that include ecosystem restoration as a purpose, and watershed and comprehensive studies.
- Section 216 reviews completed projects to determine if any changes are warranted to address environmental concerns.
- Challenge 21 Initiative fosters partnerships with other Federal and non-Federal public entities to combine the use of non-structural flood hazard mitigation options with ecosystem restoration in the Nation's floodplains.

WRDA 2000 Program Authorities

Two new programs were authorized in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2000:

- The Estuaries and Clean Waters Act of 2000 provides authority to restore degraded, damaged or lost estuary habitat and
- Section 202 provides authority to conduct Watershed Management Plans.

Programmatic Authorities

- Section 22, Planning Assistance to States, assists local and state entities in the preparation of comprehensive plans for the development, utilization and conservation of water and related land resources.
- Section 1135 involves the modification of existing U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects and operations to improve the quality of the environment.
- Section 206 involves the restoration of degraded aquatic ecosystem structure, function and dynamic processes to a less degraded, more natural condition.
- Section 204 involves the use of dredged sediments to protect, restore, and create aquatic and ecologically related habitats.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT AUTHORITIES

Some examples of key environmental initiatives across the nation include the Central and Southern Florida Comprehensive Restudy, Coastal America, Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act, Clean Water Action Plan, American Heritage Rivers, National Estuary Program, and Wetland Restoration.

The most significant environmental initiatives occurring within the State of Georgia include the restoration of degraded ecosystems and the beneficial

uses of dredged sediments. Beneficial uses of dredged sediments have been developed in coordination with current management practices. Ecosystem restoration partnership initiatives that are currently underway within the State of Georgia are outlined below by major watershed.

- Savannah Watershed: Savannah Harbor, Lower Savannah River, the Back River and the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam;
- Ogeechee Watershed: Rice Box Plantation in Chatham County and Mill Creek in Bryan County;
- Satilla Watershed: Latham River;
- Ocmulgee Watershed: Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve in DeKalb County;
- Chattahoochee Watershed: Metro Atlanta Watersheds and Walter F. George Lake;
- Flint Watershed: Flint River Springs in Decatur County;
- Coosa Watershed: Mayo's Bar Lock and Dam and Rome Levees in Floyd County, Conasauga River in Murray County and Lake Allatoona Watersheds.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP

The partnership usually begins with a local entity identifying a water resources problem or opportunity that is beyond their ability to solve. A community representative would then contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers District assigned to their watershed. Three districts, Savannah, Mobile and Jacksonville, are assigned to specific watersheds in Georgia. Each district is responsible for the development and management within their water resources boundary. The water resources boundaries for each district is based on a watershed perspective as follows:

- Savannah District
  - Altamaha Watershed
  - Ocmulgee Watershed
  - Oconee Watershed
  - Ogeechee Watershed
  - Saint Mary's Watershed
  - Satilla Watershed
  - Savannah Watershed
- Mobile District
  - Chattahoochee Watershed
  - Coosa Watershed
  - Flint Watershed
  - Ochlockonee Watershed
  - Tallapoosa Watershed
  - Tennessee Watershed
- Jacksonville
  - Suwannee Watershed

If there is an existing authority to investigate the problem and Federal funds are available, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can initiate planning services. In most cases, this entails a preliminary study to determine if there is a Federal interest. Before a detailed feasibility study can begin, a written agreement must be prepare to establish the study goal, the scope of work, schedule and a breakdown of each parties' responsibilities. If there is no available authority, then the community representative may contact their Congressional delegation to request a study authority.

CONCLUSIONS

As a steward and stakeholder of water and related land resources, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers aims to plan, design and construct projects that will provide properly managed, conserved and sustainable natural resources for the public and contribute to the quality of life for present and future generations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The legislative authorities of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can be used to enhance federal, state and local efforts in ecosystem studies and projects. The benefits of partnering with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers include leveraging Federal financial and intellectual resources to achieve greater ecosystem restoration activities, freeing state or local funds for other community needs, fostering positive interagency and intergovernmental relationships and achieving common goals.